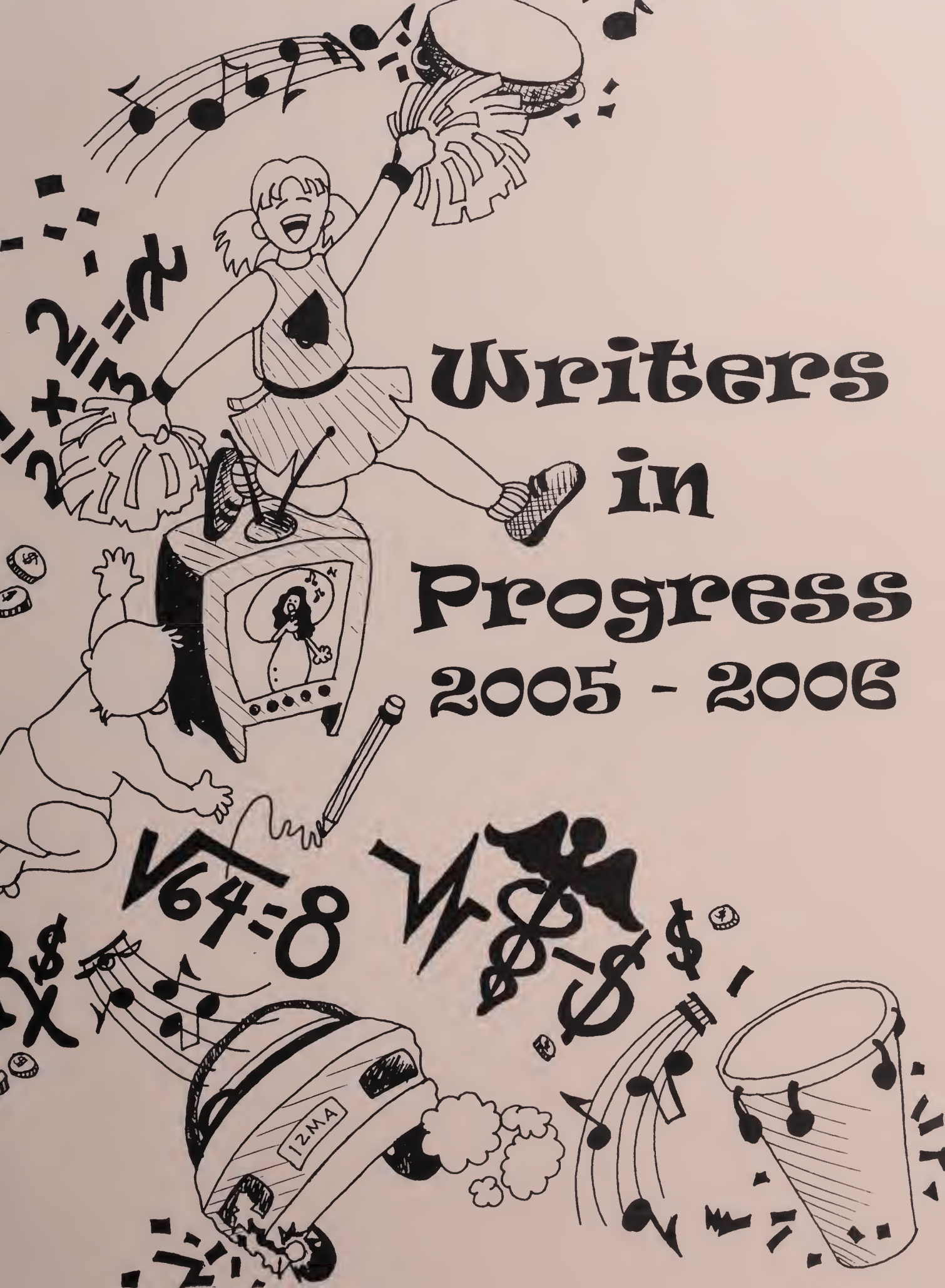

Writers in Progress

2005 - 2006

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Dedication

To all the students who think they can't,
and all the students who know they can.

Because of the large number of submissions we receive each year, we are faced with the difficult task of choosing which papers to publish. Space limitations prevent us from printing every paper we receive. We apologize because we believe that every writer who has had the courage and pride to offer his or her work for publication deserves recognition. This issue is dedicated to you.

We honor submissions from:

Linda M. Avery
Juan Barreto
Ryan Bibeau
Guita Bou Habib
Cindy Byron
Glennys M. Diaz Diaz
Tyler David
Tracy Dolce
Emanuel Figueiredo
Marie Gonzales
Antonio Govan
Yngrid Henriquez
William Howard
Katrina Hope Ingalls
Karen Lima
Kathleen Melvin
Teddy Meyer
Heriberta Mora
Alysia Puopolo
Alexandria Ruiz
Antonio Santos
Kelly Savard
Shashin Sharma
Janice Stanton
Marybeth Sullivan
Patricia Sullivan
Heidi Teel
Edward Timmons
Matthew J. Tombarello
Gachunga Lucy Walthera
Li Wen
Josh Wezesa

Introduction
by Lynne Nadeau

Do you own an object that has great significance in your life? Has one person influenced you more than anyone else you have ever met? Have you had an unforgettable experience that taught you a life lesson? What form of media is most important to you? Can music change your mood or connect you to your past? Do you hold a strong opinion that you can argue about with friends, family, or coworkers?

Most students can easily answer every one of these questions in a conversation. During your Basic Writing class this semester, your responses will become essay topics. In your essays, you will practice explaining some important aspects of your life in writing. Believe it or not, your one-word answers to the questions above will grow into two-, three-, or even four-page papers that will fill your Basic Writing portfolio and prepare you for college writing assignments.

Does this seem impossible? One year ago, it also seemed impossible to the writers represented here in Writers in Progress. This year's authors have written about a bracelet, a taillight, and their parents; about a math test, a robbery, and the internet; and finally about samba, cheerleading, immigration, and more. All of them started where you are now, at the beginning of Basic Writing, and all of them have created essays that show how clear, how careful, and how complete Basic Writing assignments can be.

As you start your semester, these example essays from last year's students can teach you about the assignments that you'll soon be working on. We hope you learn from them, and feel inspired by their success. Next year, one of your essays might even be an example for a new group of Basic Writing students who will feel inspired by you.

Guided by the Light
by Jeff Santiago

It was a rainy afternoon and I had just received a call that my 2005 Honda Civic was ready for pickup. I jumped in the taxi and arrived at the car collision center. I inspected the exterior of the vehicle to ensure the paint and the body work was well done. I finally looked in the trunk and found the old taillight they forgot to dispose. To me it represented a hard time in my life that I can say I handled well. I smiled and closed the trunk as I knew things were looking better.

I keep the taillight in my room, on top of my radio, so I can glance at it once in a while. It isn't pleasant to look at, but it helps me get through some tough days. It is actually a new model of the car so the taillight is unique from older versions. It is red with a right triangle shape, sort of like a piece of pie. The top right corner is shattered and sharp due to the collision with the guardrail on the highway, so when I hold it I have to be careful. Although the top is sharp, the back of it is quite soft. It has a suede feel to it. The inside is a shiny silver, which if it wasn't broken you wouldn't be able to see it. Whenever I look at it I get a vivid picture of the night of the accident. I see how severe it really was and realize how grateful I am that no one was hurt. The whole right side of the car was damaged and it took two weeks to repair.

The day I purchased the car from Commonwealth Motors in Lawrence I was so excited. It had the new car smell and it drove like a charm. It was my first five-speed-transmission car, so it was a whole new experience for me. My mother and little brother were so proud and they were the first ones I picked up. I was actually proud of myself because there I was at 19 getting the keys to a brand new car of the year. I showed it to all my friends and drove it frequently to get a feel for shifting gears. It is ironic how one of the features I really liked about the car was the head- and taillights. I was planning to install a new radio, apply tints to the windows and possibly put some rims on during the summer, but all that got set back due to the accident.

The accident was very scary and unexpected. It was a summer night and I was with my cousin and a friend coming back from Boston on 93 north. The road was slippery because of an earlier shower. I was doing 70 in the fast lane when I suddenly lost control. The car made a 180-degree turn and crashed against the guardrail for about five seconds. Luckily there weren't any other vehicles traveling near us at the time. After it happened, I checked if my friends were alright and could not imagine how the car would look. It smelled of burned tires, and wet mud was all over the hood. The smoke-gray paint was all chipped off and the taillight was shining bright white now that the red plastic cover was partially torn. I decided to drive home being that we were just an exit away and the car wasn't in that bad of a shape. That was the first accident I have been in and hopefully the last one. It caused me a lot of headaches and cost me even more money, but I see it as a learning experience of not trying to trip over the same rock.

I remember one afternoon I came home from work and was extremely exhausted. I just wanted to relax at home and not be bothered. Just then my brother arrived from school and asked me to give him a ride to church for his weekly rehearsals. I explained to

him that I was tired and that he should try to find another way to get there. He stomped out of the room upset and that's when I gazed at the taillight. I felt like I should get off my bed and drive my brother to church. It reminded me that this day was nothing compared to the past weeks when I couldn't drive my car.

The taillight is a memory of how I have grown up from that accident. It tells me that life gives you a wakeup call so you can appreciate things more. Now I am much more cautious when driving and make better decisions. When I see the taillight, I feel regret and get upset but it gives me strength and confidence because I know I can go through that and recover very well.

Jeff Santiago, 20, lives in Lawrence, MA, and is working toward a career in electronic technology. He was in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class in the fall of 2005. Since taking the class, Jeff states, "I feel like I am more focused when I write and have more control."

The Coin
by John P. Thompson

This priceless keepsake serves as a daily reminder of how unfortunate, intolerable events can change focus and direction in the blink of an eye. The reflection that it holds instills vigilance, purpose, and sacrifice. Many of life's lessons learned are housed in its entirety.

A 16-month rotation in Iraq ended rather nicely as the buses rolled us into our "welcome home" ceremony. Being greeted by hundreds of family, friends, and, of course, the media, made me nervous. We immediately entered into a mass formation to be greeted by our commanding general. I could feel my emotions brewing as I felt a tear roll down my face. A quick reflection of the events of September 11, 2001 passed through my mind. I was saddened by the loss of life incurred by this horrific act of violence.

The general was making his way through the formation being sure to not miss a beat and handing out coins to all soldiers. My time had come to receive the coin as I rendered a salute to the general and he reciprocated as well. The general exposed his hand to administer a handshake. Inside the cup of the general's hand lay the coin. Observing the coin for the first time, I could see that it appeared rather large in thickness and diameter, much bigger than a typical half dollar. The red, white, and blue American flag lay gracefully embedded in the coin with the U.S. Army logo, which is a black square background laced with a thin, gold border and supporting a raised white star. The coin appeared uniform, and proportional in size for the emblem that was on it. I felt raised perforations on the outside of the coin. Glancing down, those perforations were clear. "Warrior Citizen" and "Award of Excellence" were stamped neatly along the outside of the coin and those groups of words were separated by six stars. The slightly weighted coin was then turned over to reveal additional engravings along the outside. "Service to America" and "Global War on Terrorism" were neatly separated by six stars. Directly in the middle of the coin appeared two American bald eagles standing back to back within a circle. Each eagle takes one half of the circle, and one background is blue and the other is red.

After the formation ended, we were released to our families. What a joy it was to see my family after so long. My family was eager to see the coin. I recall the expression on Jack's face, who is my youngest boy. His look of amazement was truly a Kodak moment. He was fascinated by the vibrant colors of the coin and, of course, its overwhelming size. He said, "Dad, can I see it?"

I said, "Sure you can. Be careful not to scratch it."

Jack said, "That's a big, shiny coin. Where did you get it?"

I replied, "It sure is, Jack. The general gave it to me."

He replied, "The general! Who is that?"

My wife, Barbara, replied, "He's Dad's boss." Then she added, "Let's give it back to Dad, so he can enjoy it."

Jack replied, "No! I want to keep it."

I then said, "Jack, you can hold onto it for a while, but when I ask for it back you must return it."

Jack sighed, "Alright, Dad." The expression on my son's face was priceless. I knew he wanted that shiny coin. The little man understood exactly what his old man was saying. I'm sure that my keepsake will be passed on to him eventually.

The temporary home I have created for my keepsake is only a shoebox. This old, size eight, ready-to-retire shoebox houses all of my military memorabilia. Eventually, I will make a display that houses the coin. I intend on displaying the American flag and a reflection of the meaning of its colors. The color red is for hardness, white is for purity and innocence, and blue is for justice and vigilance.

Whenever I think of my keepsake, I pause with a moment of silence and prayer. A feeling of honor, pride, and dedication comes to mind. I find it remarkable how Americans tend to keep Americans going. I find it truly amazing how the worst act of terrorism can bring out the best in each and every one of us. A small part of my life was sacrificed in the name of freedom, but nothing can compare to the sacrifices on September 11, 2001.

John Thompson, 39, lives in Haverhill, MA. A computer and information technology major here at NECC, he took Basic Writing with Caroline Anderberg. After taking the course, John says, "I feel very comfortable putting my ideas and thoughts on paper and revising them to make it better."

The Bracelet That Goes Everywhere
by Kelsey Wright

In the past year I have come to own a certain bracelet that I find to be very unique. I bought it myself when I was shopping with a friend. This ordinary wooden bracelet means a lot to me. Everything about it reflects my personality.

My bracelet is a kaleidoscope of different wood tones. They range from an almost dark mahogany to a light shade of caramel. If you look close enough you can see the grain of the wood in the swirls of the bracelet. On the wood, there are golden stars and crescent moons. On the crescent moons, you can see a face, a face that smiles every time you look down. I love the sound it makes when it clunks together with my other bracelets. This single piece of jewelry has this smell that I can not forget. It is almost as if I can smell the wood of the tree it came from. If I had to guess what type of tree my bracelet came from, I think an oak tree from deep in the mountains of Montana. My bracelet, like an oak tree, is strong and sturdy, much like myself.

I wear my bracelet on my wrist, as a fashion expression to the world. When I wear it around my wrist it weighs down my hand more than normal. It is heavy, but I like that. There, along with all my other jewelry I wear, it stands out from all the rest. I add it to everything I wear, just to add some spice to my outfit. I usually plan my accessories first before what I wear. When I wear my bracelet, I feel as if I am the one everyone will mention about how fashionable I am.

The day I bought my bracelet started out as any other day in the summer. It was unbearably hot and humid that day. I would have done anything to escape the oppressing heat of summer. My friend, Kailey, and I thought, "Why not travel up to the Rockingham Mall?" As we drove down interstate 93, I was watching the brightly colored trees pass me by. Then I started to think about what I wanted to buy at the mall. At first I wanted a shirt, and then I thought about maybe a pair of new sneakers. The truth is I just did not want to spend a lot of money that day. Kailey and I pulled ourselves out of the hot car and began to walk 20 yards to the entrance. Even though it was not far, it felt like an eternity of desert. As we walked in, I saw this store, Wet Seal. I almost immediately wanted to walk in and check it out. I ventured over to the racks of jewelry, and there it was, this huge chunky looking bracelet. I was not too interested in it at first; it looked so large and heavy. I ignored my initial feeling I had about that bracelet, so instead I started to comb over all the leftover jewelry. I realize now that the reason why I bought it was because it was so different from the rest. I could not help but want to own that unique item. I felt as if that bracelet was searching for me.

My jewelry is everywhere in my room. I keep my jewelry on my bedside table, or on top of my CD cases. I carry a lot of it in my purse, and on my bookshelf. Today my bracelet now sits inside my car waiting to be added to any last minute decision. My bracelet is inside my change holder where everyone can see it. Once in a while you can find it wrapped around my gear shift. Sometimes it is either under my random bumper stickers that I own, or it is under a ton of gum wrappers.

This bracelet reminds me of so many different things that have happened in my life. It reminds me of when I went up to Maine when I was younger. I remember the smell of my aunt's log cabin, the smell of fresh-cut logs and burning firewood. It is the same scent of the wood my bracelet is made of. I also think of driving around North Andover in the summer, just my friends and I talking about what it will be like in 20 years when we have our high school reunion.

My bracelet just represents freedom to me, to be able to go where I want and not having anyone on my case about things. I have a lot of random memories that come from this ordinary piece of jewelry. I am glad that it all comes to my mind when I look down at my wrist and see my favorite piece of jewelry. I always thought that maybe I was supposed to buy the bracelet that day. I know now that it is a part of my life, and it will be along for the long and bumpy ride.

Kelsey Wright, 19, lives in Lawrence, MA, and wants to go into the medical field. She enjoys dancing and hanging out with friends. Kelsey took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class in the fall of 2005.

Under a Mother's Wing
by Edward A. Dubé

The way I live my life today is in great part to the way I was brought up by my mother. She taught me the importance of respect and the strong will to succeed under the impossible odds to survive in life. She did her best to see this important task through for all of her five children. The unconditional love and closeness I have toward my mother is irreplaceable. The way my mother dealt with the hardships of life inspired me to the challenges of life. Her kindness, patience, and her artistic style have touched all those who know her, especially me.

My mother's maiden name is Ruth Eleanor Goden. She is the fifth child of the seven children born in her family. Her first name has no significant history but just a name that her mother liked. Her middle name, Eleanor, was named after her mother's friend, whose name her mother thought was beautiful. My mother's last name, Goden, is from our French-Canadian heritage.

My mother is a beautiful woman who stands five feet six inches in height and has a petite frame. Her hair was dark brown, so dark brown it almost looked black, but now has turned naturally gray. Her hair is kept very short, usually around neck length, and that's the way it's always been since I can remember. Her eyes are as dark brown as her hair used to be and are warm and comforting to look at. My mother's eyes always show the way she feels with great intensity, which makes it obvious when she is feeling happy, sad, mad, or concerned. She always dresses in proper attire for whatever the day's events call for. The jewelry she wears is the basic wedding ring, earrings, and a watch or bracelet. Jewelry is something my mother loves like any other woman, but never goes overboard wearing it. My mother always has a sense of fashion to accommodate her appearance.

The amazing thing about my mother was the way she could keep her patience with us children when things got out of hand. At times, that patience wore very thin, but she seemed to always stay in control. She spent most of her time cleaning up after all of us or in the kitchen cooking. My mother is a wonderful cook. After all, she spent most of her time in the kitchen. As a child, I would amuse myself by watching her try to cook dinner and fight off the constant hounding and picky fingers of us bottomless-bellied children. I can still remember her telling us that we acted like we had not eaten in weeks and would shoo us away. On one particular summer afternoon cookout while placing food on the table, my brother threw a football right into the punch bowl, soaking her with the punch. We all started to laugh, except my brother, and I was pleased to see my mother start laughing, too, which showed me the level of control and patience she has.

One of the best qualities that my mother has is the ability to treat everybody with kindness. When she would have to run errands, she loved to take me with her because I was so quiet and never complained, even when it took hours to complete what she needed to get done. I still can remember grocery shopping with her one day and noticed how she stopped to talk to everybody who gloated about how cute I was, and this ended with her giving me a squeeze on the cheek and a big kiss on the forehead. My mother's smile is so heartwarming that it makes the hearts of anybody who sees it feel like they are more than just a friend, but like family.

My mother has a great sense of humor, which makes her such an enjoyable person to be around. The ability to have that sense of humor in light of what she was going through makes her a remarkable woman. My mom had to deal with five children who acted like animals at times and, like a zookeeper, she had to keep us in line, which she did with what energy she had left, but there was always some part of her that was there to give us the love that we needed to keep us a close and loving family.

My mother was smart enough back then to realize that she needed to do more to keep the household together financially. She decided to further her education to help her get a higher paying job. The next thing I knew my mother had enrolled at Framingham State College for a degree in Home Economics. I cannot remember how many years she actually went because I believe I was only about eight years old. I do remember my sister, Denise, and I helped her by keeping up on the household responsibilities while she was at school or the library studying. Everybody who knew my mother was so proud of her for graduating at age 42. This was the biggest life decision that kept us with a roof over our heads.

My mother has a very artistic and creative quality to her also. When my mother had some time to be by herself, she would go down to the basement where she had her sewing room and she would sew to her heart's desire. She would create the most beautiful pieces of clothing that anyone would love to wear. The skill of being a seamstress started at a very young age and is still a hobby she loves. As she grew, so did her passion for dancing and that passion for dancing is still a big part of her life today. I never realized how good of a dancer my mother was until I visited her when she lived in California. I saw her and my stepfather, Bill, do the most spectacular tango number that had everybody on their feet cheering. I can remember the man at the microphone said, "That was the best tango that I have ever seen performed at Passiano's." It brought a tear to my eye to see my mother, who went through so much in her life, being applauded and adored.

To this day my mother is still impressing me by the way she can still create beautiful pieces of clothing and cook up a storm in the kitchen, especially when she knows her granddaughter and I are coming to visit. I was the last child to leave the house and that was the hardest thing for me to do because of the closeness I had for her and the safe feeling I had whenever she was near. My mother now lives in Florida, but I always keep her close to my heart. I am a little wiser in my decision making in life because of the way she made hers in her life. I know that the person I am today is due to the way my mother brought me up. The best things are still being able to consult with her even though she is so far away and the relationship she has with her granddaughter.

Edward A. Dubé, 40, lives in Plaistow, NH, and is a graphic arts, layout, and design major at NECC. He was in Margaret Bergeron's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2006 and enjoys many hobbies, including cooking, gardening, drawing, fishing, and martial arts.

The Person Who Has Influenced Me to Reach My Goals
by China Silva

The person in my life who has influenced me and encouraged me to accomplish a lot, who has helped and supported me with everything I do, is my mother. She has sacrificed a lot for me since I've been born. She is extremely caring, and incredibly motivated to accomplish whatever goals she has set for herself. Once she is going for something, she almost always gets it because she never gives up. When I was younger, I'd always seem to want to give up once I was halfway through trying or completing something, whether it was in school or during different jobs. She'd always tell me, "You'll never get anywhere in life giving up halfway through things. You have to finish what you start and in the end it will be worth it and you'll feel much better than if you were to quit and give up." She's been a great person to look up to and learn from while I was growing up. She is such an important person to me because of those reasons.

When we go places together, people can always tell we are mother and daughter. Sometimes people even ask, "Are you sisters?"

My mom will always give them a strange look and say, "No, she's my daughter."

People ask this because my mother and I have a lot of the same physical features. My mother is slim and about 5'6"; she's not that tall and not too short, just medium height. She has brown straight hair that she never lets grow longer than her shoulders. She also has bangs, but not just cut straight across bangs. They're almost curled out to the sides. It's just her own type of hairdo, which looks nice on her. She has dark brown eyes. Her cheekbones are high and stand out. I think they are one of her best features. Her skin is an olive color because she is mostly Portuguese but is also part Indian. My mother doesn't wear a lot of jewelry. She normally just wears a pair of gold earrings and her wedding band. She really never wears necklaces or bracelets; she doesn't really like them. She doesn't have any tattoos and I know for sure she would never get one. She wouldn't want to put artificial ink in her body. She would say, "It's so unnatural and bad for your body. It could cause cancer you know." When she's not dressed up in her dress suit to go to the office, she just dresses casually, in a pair of jeans, some white sneakers, and a nice shirt or sweater.

The things I love the most about my mother are what I think are her best qualities, which are how she never gives up on anything she does and encourages me to do the same. This past December I finally got my G.E.D. after attending many testing sessions throughout a long period of about a year. My mom kept pushing me all year long and

nagging me saying, "Did you call about your G.E.D.? You have to get that G.E.D." I heard it every day of my life for a whole year. So I finally called and set up my first test; it was reading and writing. I passed them both; my mom was so happy. Then I got lazy and didn't set up my next two tests, which were social studies and science, for about three or four months. It drove my mom crazy because she just wanted me to finish it and get that G.E.D. because she knew it was something I needed to have. Then once again I set up my next two tests and I passed them, too, and then came math, my worst subject. I dreaded it and put it off for a long time; I think it was five months or so. When I took the test, I failed. I told my mom I didn't care and I wasn't going to take the math test over. She was pretty upset with me. Finally, I realized that to give up now would just be plain stupid. I studied for the math test and called to set it up. My mom brought me to the test and I passed. When I got my G.E.D. diploma in the mail, my mom was so pleased with me. I was also pretty happy with myself, and in the end I thought to myself, "Why didn't I get that over with sooner? It was so easy." It was worth it in the end. I was glad I had listened to my mom and didn't give up. Now I finally had my G.E.D.

My mom is enormously caring. When I was younger I was involved in many different activities, like horseback riding and dance lessons. My mother would always sacrifice her time to take me to them and sit there and watch me no matter how busy she was, which she was always very busy because I also have a sister who had her own things she needed taken care of. My mom always found a way to pay for everything I ever wanted to do, no matter how many times I changed my mind about things, because she always wanted me to be as happy as possible. I remember the whole time I was growing up, I loved horses. I wanted one more than anything in the world but never dreamed I would actually get a horse all my own. My mother made it possible though. She worked out with my grandparents to keep my horse at their house because they also had a horse and it was lonely. One day when I was about 11, it was summer time and we went to my grandparents' house for what I thought was just a visit. When we got there, I walked in. My grandfather was sitting on the couch in the living room and he said, "What a surprise! How's it going, guys?"

I said, "Good. How's Rose?" (Rose was the name of his horse.)

He said, "I'm glad you're here, China. I haven't had a chance to give her some lunch yet. Would you mind running down to the barn to throw her some hay?"

I replied, "Okay, sure," but I thought to myself, "What the heck?" My grandfather always fed her himself and normally didn't let anyone go down to the barn alone, so I thought something might be up, but I went along with it anyways. I ran down to the barn, turned the corner into the stalls, and there she was. Her name was Ginger and she was now my very own horse. My mom had surprised me with the one and only horse I really wanted. Ginger was one of the best gifts my mother ever gave me.

My mother's motivation to do anything is incredible. Back in the spring of 1999 my mother started working on a project for her job, which was working at a television station in Boston where she and my father worked together. They produced television shows and sometimes Public Service Announcements, which are somewhat like commercials. They had started a project developing a PSA about saving endangered animals. My mom was always an animal lover, so she really enjoyed this project. They worked on it for a long time, day and night, for about eight months. It took a lot to put it all together, taping it, writing scripts for it, and making a deadline to have it on the air.

My mother was called the producer, which meant she took care of basically everything for it: the scheduling, writing, taping, and the list goes on. It was only supposed to air in the Boston area and was specifically made for the TV station she and my father worked at, but my mom knew it was good enough to air nationally. She got on the phone and called various television stations to see if they would air it. People would turn it down or not call her back. It was frustrating, but she still tried and never gave up. My mom knew that there was someone out there who would love to air her PSA nationally. Finally, she got a spot on a national TV station; it aired in the spring of 2000. After it aired, my mom received an application in the mail to enter it in the Emmy awards, which are the highest awards in television, in the category of PSAs. She was so thrilled. She entered the PSA, sent the application out in the mail, and she and my father flew to New York City to attend the Emmy awards. She and my father won the Emmy award for best PSA. I knew she would; I was so happy for her. It just showed me that she could do anything as long as she had her motivation to never give up.

The things my mother does to make me happy are things I'll never forget. They are things that made growing up fun and memorable. She has accomplished so much and gone through a lot to get where she is today. My mother is doing exactly what she wants and she's happy. She's showed me to never give up, do my best, reach for my goals and I can succeed. My goals right now are to do well in school and eventually finish with a degree in criminal justice. I'm enjoying school and doing well in my classes. I would say I owe a lot of my motive and drive to finish school and get a good job doing what I love to my mother and all the help she has given me along the way. Her encouragement toward me has made me a better and happier person. Now I'm not the person who always gives up. I love to finish what I start and complete everything I do.

China Silva, 19, lives in Newbury, MA, where she works as a bakery manager. Before taking Stefanie Forster's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2006, she "always dreaded writing. It was one of my least favorite things to do." Now that China has finished the course, she enjoys writing more and feels, "I'm much better at writing."

A Teaching Relationship
by Dan Starr

Throughout life, people must have some sort of motivation to get through life and to get things done. So far in my life this person is my father. Ronald Starr is a very well respected man in both his community and his place of work. He has a job which he enjoys and loves to do. To this day he pushes me to do things better, and if not to do things better then to actually get them done. For this, I am eternally grateful and I still have not stopped learning from his example.

My father is an extremely happy man, and it is a rarity that you see him without a smile on his face. As you first see him, you notice his white teeth, which remind me of a bright white snow. Surrounding those teeth is a goatee that he has had for years that is a reddish-brown color like that of a chipmunk. Also, when he smiles, his cheeks rise up creating a bulge just below his eyes which also reminds me of a chipmunk. His eyes are a soft brown color that reminds me of the color of a light chocolate bar. His hair is short and has the color of a moonless night. I recently saw a picture of him in the 1970s at the time he graduated high school. I was overcome with laughter as I saw the giant afro that was on top of his head.

My father dresses differently during the week and the weekend. If you can catch him during the week, he is dressed in his work attire, which is pretty casual seeing how he is a professor at Northeastern University. His work attire consists of a pair of white shoes that are discolored from time. He wears a pair of very discolored blue jeans almost all of the time. I don't think I could even tell you the last time I saw him without jeans on. Tucked into his jeans is a collared shirt which can be of many colors and is not normally a full button down, but rather a V-neck with a few buttons. He almost always wears a pair of black sunglasses which have a reflective outside lens that seems to hide his eyes. On the weekends he is usually dressed much more casually. He wears a pair of shorts and a T-shirt which has some visuals on it, but he just wears what he has. Jewelry is something my father would never wear. He used to wear a watch, but since he got a cell phone he sees it as obsolete. The only piece of jewelry he wears now would be his wedding ring, which I don't think I have ever seen him without.

When I think of my father there are quite a few characteristics that come to mind. One of the main ones would be patience. Throughout the years, I haven't been what you would call a model son. I have my down times just as any, but for me they just seem to come in waves. No matter how bad it got, he was always there for me giving me the motivation and support I needed to get through it. I remember one thing he is always nagging me about is how I smoke cigarettes. We seem to have the same conversation every day:

"Dan, you know those things are horrible for you. When are you gonna quit?"

"I know they're bad, Dad, but I enjoy smoking them."

"Yes, well one of these days you're going to regret that."

"Well, Dad, I'm sure I will."

I never thought it would happen until my senior year in high school and it actually did. I was playing hockey for the high school team. Unfortunately, it is against MIAA rules to be in possession of or seen using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. So, as you can tell, that was a bit of a problem for me. One day, after school, I was seen smoking a cigarette by the attendance officer of the school. He told my principal and I was suspended for two weeks for the violation. The only words from my father were, "I told ya so." That is why he keeps telling me when I need to do something or when I need to stop doing something. He knows I may not listen to him then, but in time I will learn he is right.

Another quality he possesses is generosity, mostly with his time. Any time that my brother or I happen to need anything, he is always there to talk about it or to help us out. If I ever needed some help with homework, he is always right there to help me out. He is also very generous with his time toward the town we live in. When I was 11 years old, I was on a Little League team. My father decided it would be fun to help out and be a coach. He enjoyed it so much that he decided to stick with it. It has now been nine years since he first started to coach and he enjoys it as much as the day he started. He makes it fun for the kids all while teaching kids the ropes of the game. I remember the look on his face when his team won the championship for the second year in a row. The giant smile and look of accomplishment was the same look as that of kids on his team.

My father is also perhaps one of the most intelligent people I know. He attended St. John's Prep during his high school years, which is well known for its academic challenges. After graduating, he decided to go to college at Bucknell University, yet another school known for its academic standards. After graduation, he became employed as the director of the news at WB56. I remember the conversations we used to have when I was a little kid and he was about to leave for work.

"Dad, please, please, please, bring me with you!!" I would yell.

"Okay, Dan, but when you get home you have to go right to bed," he'd bargain.

"Alright, Dad, I will. I promise!" I'd say enthusiastically.

"And you have to eat your veggies tonight," he'd throw in.

"That's a cheap shot, Dad. But, okay," I'd agree.

Nowadays it's a little different: "You wanna come to 56 with me, Dan?" he'd ask.

"Maybe some other time, Dad," I'd say. He knows it won't happen, but we still have the same conversation all the time. It serves as a needed reminder of the past.

After directing the news for many years, he was offered a job as a professor at Northeastern University, which is where he is currently employed. Because he was a professor at the school, he was able to take classes free of charge. In addition to his degree from Bucknell, he also has two more degrees from Northeastern. Anytime I have a question, he almost always has the answer. I remember his favorite TV show was always Jeopardy. We used to sit on the couch and watch it every night. It was amazing the things he knew. I remember one night I actually answered more correct questions than he did. The look on his face was amazing. He had perhaps one of the proudest looks that I have ever seen a person give. Although this is definitely a rarity, I can say that I beat perhaps the most knowledgeable person I know in Jeopardy. It is remarkable the amount of knowledge he possesses.

I would not be the person I am today had it not been for my father. Seeing the success that he got from simply sticking things through drove me to try to do the same.

His influences will stick with me throughout life. Through him I have learned to stick through things and to get them done and done well. I believe that having him as my father has made me a better person. This is a quote that he told me and I have not forgotten to this day: "Make sure if you do something, it's something you'd be proud to show off to the world." His constant reminders to achieve greatness are an amazing thing that keeps me striving to be a better and more respected person.

Dan Starr, 18, is from Amesbury, MA, and is a general studies major at NECC. He was in Caroline Anderberg's Basic Writing class in the fall of 2005. "I always thought I was a decent writer," Dan said. However, after completing the course he adds, "I have gained a better understanding of the make-up of a paper and how to improve one."

Here's Jack
by Keith D. Deguio

Believe me when I tell you August 11, 2004 did not start the way I had thought it would. I remember it like it was yesterday. The day is imprinted into my brain. It was around one in the morning and I was working the night shift at the fire station. The early morning air was heavy and it was a challenge sleeping. It must have been about 80 degrees outside. I was expeeting a niee quiet shift. In a blink of an eye, my life would begin to change again.

I suddenly awoke to the ringing of the telephone. That early in the morning, it is usually someone reporting an emergency. I answered the phone in a sleepy voiee, "Amesbury Fire Department. What is your emergency?"

The voice on the other end said softly, "Hi, it's me."

I said, "Hi, who is this?"

She said, "It's your wife, stupid."

I remember my heart feeling like it was coming up into my throat. My wife never ealls me at work and I immediately knew something bad had happened. I said, "What is the matter?"

She hesitated and said, "I am not feeling right."

I asked her what she meant and she eould not describe what she felt. She told me she and my mother-in-law, Cheryl, were on their way to the Beverly Hospital beeause the doetor on duty wanted to see her. The last thing I told her before we hung up with eaeh other was, "Keep me informed," and, "I love you."

In a calm voice, she said, "Everything will be fine. There is nothing to worry about."

I remember having the same nervous feeling for the next few hours. It was impossible to sleep. I did not know what to expect. My wife, Lisa, was pregnant with our seeond ehild. Lisa was almost full-term. The next thing I remember is that it was almost seven in the morning and I was just opening my eyes. I sprang from my bed. I ehecked my cell phone for any missed calls. I had none. There was no way to eontact my wife unless I called the hospital switehboard. Just then, the phone rang and it was my wife. She said, "You have to get here as quick as you ean."

I responded, "Why? What's going on and why didn't you call me?"

She yelled, "Just get here now or it will be too late!"

The phone disconnected and I looked at the clock. I had one more hour to go before the end of my shift. At this point, I was a nervous wreck and did not know what to think. My relief arrived at 7:45 and I bolted out the door. I said, "George, no time to talk. I have to go."

As I made the 40-minute drive to Beverly Hospital, I eould not even think straight. To this day, I still do not remember the route I took. I do know that I cursed out a bunch of other drivers on the road and ran a red light. It seems like when you are in a hurry every erazy driver gets behind the wheel. All I eould think about was getting to the hospital to be by my wife's side. All sorts of things were rushing through my mind. I eould not help but think if my Lisa was having eomplieations and if the baby was okay. Our first child, Jamie, was delivered by cesarean seetion. Jamie's heart rate eontinually dropped to a dangerous level. The doctors thought it would be best not to have my Lisa

deliver naturally. I just prayed that both would be all right.

I pulled into the packed parking lot and made the two-mile trek to the door. I walked through the emergency room to the registration desk and gave the receptionist my wife's name. She said, "Third floor and hurry!" I figured that she was expeeting me and headed straight for the nearest elevator. I arrived to the third floor and there stood my mother-in-law. Cheryl had a look of extreme nervousness upon her face. The look on her face meant nothing to me. Cheryl has this look about her face all the time. The nurse came rushing by and asked me if I was the father. I told her who I was and she tossed me a gown, cap, and feet covers. She said, "This way." I quickly donned my new outfit and proceeded through a set of double doors marked, "Sterile area, authorized personnel only."

As I entered the room, I saw several people standing over my wife who was lying down on a shiny metal gurney. Even though there were white sheets beneath her, I said to myself, "That must be cold." There must have been four or five nurses along with Lisa's doctor standing over her. She too had a gown and cap on and there was a divider between her head and upper torso. Even in her condition, she looked beautiful. I could see a worried look on her face under her oxygen mask. I sat down and grabbed her hand. She said, "Thank God you made it."

I remember sitting there on a swivel stool next to the gurney. Several fluorescent lights hanging above us brilliantly lighted the room. The heat was so intense I began to sweat; I could feel it dripping from my forehead. My hands were sweaty from holding Lisa's hands so tightly. The combination of disinfectant and coffee put a foul taste in my already dry mouth. For several moments, I just sat there in silence. All you could hear was the doctor and nurses talking and the sound of the suction machine operating. I just kept looking at my wife and looking at the doctor's face. It felt like an eternity had gone by and then the doctor said, "Here he is." My son, Jack, rushed by me to another table where his mouth was suctioned, all vital signs were checked, and then the nurse asked me, "Dad, would you like to cut the cord?"

I replied, "Absolutely!"

Jack was wrapped tightly in a blue, pink, and white blanket and placed into my arms. As I was holding Jack, my wife and I looked at one another and said, "He's beautiful just like his sister." Jack was born 6 pounds, 12 ounces, and 21 inches in length. He was sporting a few strands of dark black hair and had the fattiest little cheeks. Just like when Jamie was born, several months leading up to the delivery my wife said to me, "I hope he is not funny looking."

At this time, I realized that I was partly responsible for bringing another precious little life into the world. I did not feel any overwhelming responsibility at this point. I knew that Jack would be in the hospital for a few days. I had this time to let being a father of two sink in. The responsibility would come the day we brought Jack home. The sleepless nights, all-night feedings, and diaper changes would start again.

My wife and I only had a few moments to take a good look at him and hold him before he was taken up to the nursery. The next few hours were hectic. The baby was in the nursery being warmed up and receiving his shots. My wife was recovering and the grandparents were in awe. It was not until later in the evening that my wife and I were able to sit down and talk in private. I remember my wife saying, "This time it will be easy."

I said, "I hope so, but I have a funny feeling about this one."

My wife said, "Ya, but we have been through this before and we know what to do."

I said, "Doesn't matter. Every baby is different."

The day finally ended. I left the hospital around 9 pm. The baby was sleeping in the nursery, the wife was sleeping, and I was traveling home to check on our three-year-old daughter, Jamie. I slowly opened her bedroom door and peeked in. She had her mouth open widely. I whispered in her ear that she was a big sister.

I do not think it really sunk in until the next day that I am responsible for another little life. I remember when my daughter was born, the lifestyle I had growing up changed drastically. There was no more going out with friends or staying out late and partying. There would be no coming and going as I pleased. With another child, now the little free time I had for myself was now gone. I think with the birth of my son I have gained even greater responsibility and realize that my daughter and son are my sole priority in life. I would not have it any other way. I feel that my life is complete.

Keith D. Deguio, 30, from Georgetown, MA, took Clare Ostrander's Basic Writing course in the fall of 2005. Before taking the class, Keith was not very enthusiastic about writing. Since completing the course, he now feels much more comfortable with writing. When he's not in class, Keith works as a police officer. Keith is a criminal justice major at NECC.

First and Last Time Ever!
by Juan Ruiz

All my life, I was brought up with discipline, manners, respect for others, and taught to never steal. There was always a consequence to pay if I didn't follow the rules of life. If I did steal, showed disrespect to anyone, or didn't have the right manners, I would get a good old-fashioned whipping. The wet, black, thick leather belt, the old ragged slippers, the tall, skinny, solid broomstick, or the hand of my mother would be used to get a message through. I tried to stay away from conflicts or trouble until one hot and sunny day in Haverhill, MA, on High Street.

I was by High Street Market. I had just turned 17 years old. One of my friends, or should I say associates, came to my house. His name was Steve Thomson, and he stood about six feet four inches tall, with black, silky, curly hair, and dark brown eyes. He had tan skin, and looked like he was Hispanic. He was mixed race (half black and half white). He had a reputation as a troubled child, troublemaker, and an instigator. Steve came by to play basketball with his Allen Iverson jersey on, bouncing a ball like he knew what he was doing.

"Yeah, let's play some ball. I'm feeling it. Today is my day. I'm going to put it on you and break your ankle," Steve said.

"Come on then. I'm going to shut you up because I'm tired of hearing you run your mouth," I replied.

When we got to the courts off of High Street, there were lots of kids playing. Steve didn't want to wait, so he said, "Let's go smoke in the woods back there."

As I started to inhale the joint, I started to cough ballistic and thought I was going to die. I had a weird sensation at the time that made me feel mindless.

"I have a plan. If you find 50 dollars, I'll put the rest and we can get more of this to do all day," Steve said.

I didn't have any money, and I knew my parents weren't about to give me money. I told Steve, "The next person I see walking with a purse, I'm snagging it."

"Yeah, right. You don't have the guts, and if your parents find out they will kill you. Now I know you're talking trash," replied Steve.

As we left the park, we turned on to High Street and in my sight there was a lady coming out of High Street Market with a purse. "There you go, someone with a purse, or was that just all talk?" He was instigating me to do it by calling me a mother's boy, a big chicken, and a coward.

My bones were shaking, my heartbeat was racing, and my adrenalin was boiling. I at one point was scared, but my mind was gone with the joint I just finished. I started to run, acting like we were playing keep away with the ball. I got close to this lady and ripped her purse right off of her, as she screamed for help. We started to run through the alleys. "Let's meet at your house in five minutes," I said as my whole body was shaking. Steve jumped the fence and I went the long way to his house, hoping I would not get busted.

"Yeah, I did it. I told you I wasn't scared or a chicken. What are we going to do now with this money and purse?" I asked. When we looked in the purse, we found I.D., plastic cards, and 250 dollars in cash, so we threw the purse and the belongings in the

trash located in Steve's room. We started to dance like we just won the lottery. To cool off, we began to play the PlayStation and reminisce about what had just happened.

Three hours later, we started walking to get more of the illegal substance. We assumed we got away with it, cracking jokes about what just happened. When we got to Heffner's Gas Station, 10 minutes away from the crime scene, four police cruisers surrounded us. "Get on your knees, with your hands in the air!" the policemen said as they pointed their guns at us. I was not thinking about jail. I was thinking about the whipping my parents were going to give me.

The description given to the police was two Hispanic boys with shorts and jerseys on, both with black hair, and over six feet tall. The police found $300 on me, $250 from the lady and $50 from Steve. I tried to lie, but it made the situation a lot worse. When I went to jail, the police had a two-sided window. Steve and I were in one side and the lady was in the other and said, "Those are the boys that almost gave me a heart attack and stole my purse."

The detectives talked to us and said, "You kids are looking at a lot of time. Two and a half years for unarmed robbery. Are you ready for that?"

Steve confessed and said, "He did it. I had nothing to do with it." As he left me stranded, I tried doing a plea bargain by telling the officers I was under the influence. He didn't care. He wanted me to learn the hard way. As I was talking to myself, I knew my life was over. No more school, girls, friends, or family for me. My basketball career went down the gutter. How could Steve do this to me? I thought he was my friend. It is true what people say, "Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer." That is why I no longer communicate with Steve. What a friend!

Two years were taken away from me as the consequence was I went to jail. Never again in my life will I give anyone the satisfaction of taking away my freedom. The conclusion is that parents should know what their kids are doing. Bad peers, the wrong crowd, streets, and drugs can have a big influence on young kids. I wish I could meet the lady and apologize to her, and let her know I'm not on the same path that I was at age 17. I try not to bring my past up but every time I do whether good or bad, I hope others can learn something from it.

Juan Ruiz, 25, of Lawrence, MA, took Mike Wilcomb's Basic Writing course in the summer of 2005. Before he took the course, he thought writing "was boring and a waste of time." Now that he's finished the course, he enjoys writing. He is married and has four children: Brandon, 6, Ayshia, 3, Enrique, 2, and Diane, 3 months. In the future, Juan hopes for a career in hotel and restaurant management.

Hard Work Pays Off
by Diane Shugrue

It was Tuesday, February 7, 2006, at 2:00 pm. I was sitting in my chair physically trembling. My hands were sweating so much I had to keep wiping them on my pants to keep from dropping the pencil I held in it. My heart was beating so intensely I felt that someone could see it through my shirt. I had a stomachache that wouldn't quit. I can't remember ever being this stressed out prior to this day. I was sitting in room C103 about to take my first algebra exam and would soon learn a valuable lesson.

While I sat waiting for the professor to hand out our exam, I began to reflect on the past three weeks leading up to this traumatic day. I had spent what seemed like 300 hours studying at the Math Center and with my husband at home. I had been introduced to so many new algebra terms I thought my head was going to burst. We started with natural numbers, dividing and multiplying of integer numbers, elements of a set, conversions, square roots, exponents, and order of operations. These were some of the new algebraic vocabulary I learned. After that he taught me equality signs, which is less than or equal to, and greater than or equal to signs, and that was just the first hour of the class, followed by fractions and lowest common denominators. Next I learned the additive inverse, which means opposite of the number. I had to wonder who was the genius that came up with a rule that tells me when I see –(5) it is really -5, but when I see –(-5) it means 5. Why didn't they just write what they meant instead of adding extra confusion to the problem?

I thought that was bad until I learned that the absolute value – |-12| is equal to negative -12 but the additive inverse of – (-12) means positive 12. The differences between the two are the curved lines versus straight line. This drives me crazy! When these mathematicians got together why didn't they make them equal the same? Clearly they were not thinking rationally. Why did they insist on making it more complicated than it needed to be? Wait; it gets better. Here is the biggest mind teaser of all: adding and subtracting integers, the rule says, if the signs are alike then you add and keep the sign. Here is a perfect example of same signs if both numbers are positive: 15 + 15 = 30. However, if the signs are different then you subtract and keep the sign of the larger number, for example, a positive and negative sign or different signs: -15 + 10 = -5. I know what you're thinking. -15 is not more than a positive 10. I actually thought the same thing but I was incorrect. The professor said, "A negative number is less than a positive number on the number line. Except in this case, you would ignore the signs."

My reply to him was, "Are you kidding with me?" Clearly, he had to be. Why would that be different? Those three weeks went by so quickly and now the big day was here.

I went into the test not knowing if I knew enough material to pass. I arrived at 1:50 pm, 10 minutes early, and decided to review my notes. As the students began to arrive, I could hear them talking about how easy the test would be. Of course, they would think it was easy. Some of the students had taken the class last semester, while others had algebra in high school. I didn't fit into either one of those equations. I hadn't been to school in over 20 years. I didn't know any algebra prior to this class! I was so jealous of them. They had no idea how fortunate they were.

The professor entered the classroom. This was it. My failure was near. He began to pass out the exam saying, "You have the entire two hours to complete the 18-problem exam." You would think no one really needs two hours to do 18 problems, but that would not be a true statement. I needed it. After what seemed to be only a few minutes into the exam, I could hear voices. "Have a nice weekend, professor." I looked up and noticed people turning in their exams. How can they possibly be done? I was only on problem number four. I looked at the clock and 20 minutes had gone by. I was convinced I would never be finished by 3:50 pm. I took a deep breath and went back to work. I then noticed the woman next to me get up, which forced me to look at the clock again. Now it was 2:45 pm and I was the only person left in the class. The pressure got more intense for me to finish. What if the professor wants to leave? Will he ask me to turn it in before I am done? As the woman passed me, she said, "Good luck."

I smiled at her and thought to myself, "I need more than luck; maybe my own personal leprechaun would do the trick." I had completed half the test at this point, skipping the hard ones. My strategy was to work on the easy problems first and then go back and tackle the difficult ones. I looked at the clock and it was 3:45 pm; I had only five minutes to finish. I was stuck on a fraction problem. I began to talk to myself. I had done the same fraction problem three times and got three different answers. My poor eraser was getting a strenuous workout. I was thinking maybe I should put all of my answers on the test and he can just pick the correct one. One of them had to be right. I finally snapped out of it. I told myself to just pick one and be done with it. It was now 3:50 pm and I had one problem that needed more work but time was up.

I had to turn my paper in to the professor. I stood staring at him waiting for him to look up, and then I asked him, "Would you mind peeking at my paper? I cannot go home for the weekend not knowing if I passed or not." I was hoping he could tell me if I got half of them right.

He said, "Sure, I don't mind at all." I was expecting him to say it looks good and send me on my way. However, much to my surprise he actually started to correct it right in front of me. At this point I was biting my nails (something I never do) and my stomach felt sick as I watched him. The first column had nine questions and the second column had nine as well. I watched as he checked the first problem, and he wrote a big C. The first one was correct. On to number two, and the second one was correct. Number three was correct. Numbers four and five were correct. Just as I was starting to get excited, he came to number six. Number six was the fraction I was struggling with. Then he stopped and said, "You didn't do the fraction problem correct." One wrong, and he was on to number seven. He said, "You didn't simplify the problem and I need to take points off." I thought, "Some points are better than no points," and I was okay with that. Eight and nine were correct. I now had seven out of nine, and he still had nine more to check. I still had a chance to pass this test. I watched him as he continued on to the second column. First one was correct. The second one was correct. The third and fourth ones were correct. I could feel myself getting excited inside; more than half were now correct. My goal was to get at least a C or 70%. He soon finished correcting the second column and they were all correct. He took out his calculator to figure out the final grade. He wrote 93%. Oh my God, I felt like I had superpowers. How was it possible that I passed? The professor said, "You did well. You could teach this class."

I replied, "That is sweet, but I don't think so!" I couldn't wait to tell anyone who would listen to me that I had passed the test. I felt like someone who had won a big award. I couldn't wait to thank my husband for all of his time tutoring me. I also had to thank the people at the Math Center. I had spent all of my spare time there.

On one occasion Pat had joked, "We are going to have to charge you rent." The next day I stopped in to the Math Center and sat down at one of the tables.

Tracy saw me and asked, "Did you have your test yet?"

I replied with an enormous smile, "Yes."

She then asked me, "Did you do well?"

I replied by nodding my head up and down. I said, "I got a 93%." I then thanked her for all her patience.

I have learned a number of valuable lessons. I learned that hard work and dedication definitely pays off. In addition, I have learned to keep a positive attitude and to never give up when the going gets tough. I have come to realize most people are nervous when taking a test and that I should channel that energy into constructive studying. All new things take time to learn. We need to give ourselves time to adjust and not sell ourselves short. I have another test coming up next week and I have additional studying to do before I will be ready. However, the most important element is I am going into this second test with much more confidence. In closing, put into algebraic terms, a strong desire to succeed plus practice and dedication equals results.

Diane Shugrue, 47, lives in Lawrence, MA. She is also married and has two sons, Danny and Ryan. Diane took Stefanie Forster's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2006. After taking the course, Diane said, "I feel more confident about writing." She is at NECC to earn a graphic design degree.

The Entertaining Internet
by Linda Hovey

I enjoy using my personal computer to go online. I love to go on the internet and use the many sites available. I feel it is the most valuable invention since the television, VCR, or any video game. The computer gives me many hours of pleasure. I know the internet has changed my life for the better because I have fun sending and receiving emails, playing computer games, shopping online, and searching the web for sites for work or pleasure.

First of all, I enjoy sending and receiving emails on a daily basis. The first thing I do when I go online is check my email. If I have gotten any emails, the computer will tell me once I am completely online. It says, "You've got mail." It is such an easy way to keep in touch with my family and friends. I can send emails to my sister in Maine or my brother in Spain. The letter I type to anyone can be sent through the internet to their email address online when I enter the send command. For instance, I remember before I had a computer how long it used to take to mail a letter to my sister in Maine. I would type a letter, put it in the mailbox, and my sister would receive it days later. If there is something going on in my life that morning I can send an email to my sister through the computer and she will know about it right after it happened. It really has made communication a lot easier and faster.

Although I enjoy sending and receiving emails, I also enjoy playing games online. I enjoy playing games such as Solitaire, Poker, and even Uno. Being able to play games online makes having a computer a lot more fun. I look forward to going online and entering in my favorite game site to play my card games. I even like playing board games like Parcheesi or Battleship. It is so much fun and there are so many different games to choose from. If I wanted to, I could play a different game every night of the week and go almost six months without even playing the same game twice. Along with playing games, I can even make friends by chatting with them while I am playing. In one case, I remember playing Battleship and chatting with a young man. We chatted about where I had my ships hidden and who was the better player. Even though I ended up by sinking all of his ships that night, I had noticed the next day I had an email from him. He wanted to know when I was going to be playing that game again. Friends and games, what better way to enjoy the computer?

Since I have been online, playing games isn't the only thing I enjoy. I have discovered shopping online via my computer. I have found a lot of stores online that have many items that are cheaper than going to the actual store to buy them. The only problem is that they charge you for shipping. I remember the time my daughter, Megan, wanted a Bionicle Lego toy at the K-B toy store. I went online and found the Lego set she wanted at the K-B site and it was even on sale for internet buyers only. I bought the Lego set with my credit card and had it shipped to our home. Megan called me at work and said, "Mom, did you buy a Bionicle Lego?"

I said, "Yes, I bought it online for you. Did we get it in the mail?"

Megan said, "Yes. Did you buy it online?"

I said, "I sure did and I even got it on sale." She thought it was the neatest thing to have toys mailed to her from her favorite toy store. The internet has made it a lot of fun shopping online.

Not only do I like searching for stores to go shopping online, I also like to search for information, which has made my children and my school life a lot more rewarding. My son had to do a current events essay and I didn't have a newspaper in the house for him to get his information from. We went online to the Lawrence Eagle Tribune web page and actually read the newspaper online. He got the information he needed with just a click of the mouse. I remember when I was in high school, if I had to do a term paper, I would have to pull out my parents' old encyclopedia books and search through the 20 volumes. Now all we have to do is go online, type our term paper subject in, and within seconds there are at least 100 different sites to choose from, all about that particular subject. It has helped us research information in a faster and more specific manner.

Despite enjoying the internet and the luxury of having to be on the computer during the day, I have found that it has taken away time I could be using with my family at night. In this instance, the computer hasn't been a valuable invention. If I didn't have the computer, I think I would find a different outlet in my life. I could watch television, read books with my children, or even bake a cake with my daughter. In the past, the television has always been the box we would watch and have on day and night. Now that we have our computer, it seems to be the new box in our house. At least the computer is more educational than a video game for the kids.

In conclusion, having a computer and going online has changed my life for the better. Sending and receiving emails, playing games, shopping, and searching the internet for information has made life a lot more fun and easier. I can't imagine life without my computer. It has played a big part at my job, typing up letters and creating reports. It has even played a bigger part at my home life, playing games with my kids or just sending a goodnight email to my sister. The computer is a great way to spend time working, playing, or just to pass some time.

Linda Hovey, 43, of Haverhill, MA, took Clare Ostrander's Basic Writing course in the fall of 2005. Now that she's completed the course, she feels more confident writing essays. She is at NECC to earn an Alcohol Drug Abuse Counseling Certificate. When she is not in school, she is busy with her husband of 17 years and their two teenage children.

Digital World
by Shria Morrissette

Real life has always had limits. There will always be police or scientific laws that prevent our wishes from becoming real. When was there a time we saw a real dragon, or witnessed a real laser gun fight in space? The internet has few limits, unlike the real world. On the internet you could have pigs fly or wolves with pink fur. The internet is well used for businesses as well as for games and even technology. By using the internet, I have learned that there are ways it has impacted my life, such as role playing, art, and chatting.

One of the major ways would happen to be role playing online. The basic definition for role playing is acting, but online. For example, instead of watching the play in person you are witnessing a story book being told by many users across the world. Role playing can not only be fantasy, but sci-fi, medieval, furry-related, and more. There are tons and tons of topics to choose from. Some users even create their own versions of a story that was made before, such as Harry Potter or The Lord of the Rings. No rules are broken as long as the role play is not published. One of the most popular ways to role play is on a place called a forum. A forum is a message-based board where users from anywhere around the world can post a message. Then later on another user will come onto the site and read the message. If they feel they have something to say then that user will reply to the last message. By using this forum you can post a message to begin a story. A user will post in their message the time, place, weather, character description, and more. When they are done, another user will reply and add onto that story about what they are doing. Basically, you are helping to create your very own story, but without having to go through publishing it or worrying about a person making mistakes. It may sound like all fun and games, but there are rules to running a role play forum. Every forum will have a certain owner and helpers called moderators. These users are here to keep a forum safe and running smoothly so no one is hurt, made fun of, or feels threatened.

By role playing, I have learned to expand my creativity. I love to share my stories with others and be willing to create characters for these stories. When role playing, I have started thinking about writing my own story sometime in the future. By listening to others post their part of a story, I gain ideas more so than sitting in a dark room to ponder away until I can't stay awake anymore. It has inspired me in ways I never thought possible. For that, I am thankful and hope to continue on with it.

There are other ways the internet has done well for me. One major way would have to be the art area. Before I discovered the internet, I thought of my art as the best there is and it would not need improvement. When I looked at others posting their art, I was astonished and just plain amazed at how other users out there can draw so well. I never thought twice about my own art. Yes, I draw mainly wolves and dragons and so forth, but I never knew I needed improvement. I admit seeing how good others' art was made me down knowing my experience felt like a waste of time and effort. I began to realize that by looking at others' art I could get ideas on how to become better. I just needed to work harder, so by studying how they drew and listening to their thoughts and opinions I started getting better. When I finally got a scanner one Christmas, I started to

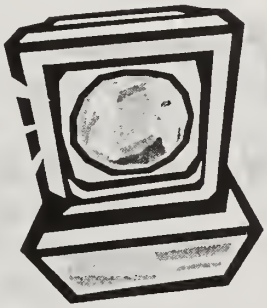
scan my art onto my computer. From there I posted on a website called Deviant Art. I have been there for about three years now. I feel my art is not the best out there and maybe it is not the worst either, but posting it has made me feel proud knowing others do enjoy looking at it. Since then I've gotten better, not only with a pencil, but with a computer mouse. I have acquired the ability to use painting programs on a computer, such as Photoshop or Jasc Paint Shop Pro. Now I can color one computer screen so my art is not all just black and white or colored pencils. People all over the world from many countries can look at it and even give me ideas on how to get better. If anyone ever feels they would like to see my art they are welcome to by just going to http://www.nishastar.deviantart.com. Now whenever I'm not lazy at drawing or coloring, I upload or otherwise post my art there to see how I've progressed. It is a good way of getting ideas and suggestions to get better. Yes, sometimes the comments users will post on a piece of art can be harsh, but that's part of being an artist. Not everyone will like how a person draws, but it is very common that one will not like a certain artist's style.

One last way the internet has helped me is meeting new people. The internet may have fake identities sometimes, so you have to be careful about what you share online about yourself. Chat places can be very dangerous. I know not from experience, but from reading about others who went through terrible situations. There will be times when a person you are talking to is not who they say they are. You have to use your best judgment and never share your real info with anyone online, especially if you have never seen them in person before. There have been cases where a young child was kidnapped or maybe stalked. When a person does go to a chat place, they really have to understand the dangers they are getting into and be very careful. Never in your life should you share your address or phone number.

Yes, chat sites do have risks, but there is an upside. Most chats these days will have an admin, otherwise known as an administrator, to help users. If someone is bothering another user, they are free to call an admin for help. The administrator's job is to keep the chat safe. Many chats have different rules, such as Wolfhome. Wolfhome is the chat I am an administrator on and it is my job to keep the chat safe. Wolfhome's rules are for PG13 and older only. This chat in particular is a chat where you are free to roam a room on screen as a 2D wolf character. It is easy to use and free. If one feels they'd like to use it, they can go to http://www.wolfhome.com/. To become an administrator is not hard. You have to understand the rules and respect other users. The administrators are always willing to help when there is someone there who needs it.

I have met many new people from all around just by going to a chat site. I have been to many chat sites and programs, such as Active Worlds, Excite, Furcadia, and even the current one now, Wolfhome. By going to these chat sites, I have learned things about myself and what I never thought about before. I've even discovered some beliefs that I feel represent me in ways that I cannot describe. I've also learned about other countries and what their rules and traditions are. I've mainly met people from England, but also Canada and even Australia. Chat sites are always good to go to when you know how to use them. There are chats out there for any topic. You will even meet people who have the same thoughts and opinions as you. Chats can be about anything from politics to religion or even movies. Chat places will always have people who you can even be friends with.

There are bad times and even good times on the internet, but that's how you learn. You will never experience all bad events, but you will never experience all good either. I hope it never fades out of existence, for technology is the next step up in life. Technology is very important for the future for computers, machines, and, maybe one day, robots. The internet has helped me in many ways I cannot count. It has improved my art, my imagination, and even my knowledge of other places and people. I hope to only learn more as I continue and the internet grows.



Shria Morrissette, 18, lives in Amesbury, MA. She took Wendy Leeman's Basic Writing course in the fall of 2005. Since taking the class, Shria says of her writing, "I am confident I can do a good job now." Shria is a graphic design major here at NECC, and, in the future, she hopes for a career as a video game designer.

All in One
by Bradley T. Wright

The crack of the bat, Trot Nixon sends a baseball out of Yankee Stadium. Television allows me to view this right in my own home. I have cable television, which is my favorite media outlet. I like to read the newspaper or listen to the radio, but television gives me everything in one package. I like to watch up-to-the-minute weather reports, live sporting events, or the current news because they influence my daily life.

The Weather Channel is a great tool for planning my daily schedule. I watch the Weather Channel to figure out what I should wear outside. Do I bring an umbrella with me in case of rain? The Weather Channel can answer that question. I can plan my weekend by watching the weather. If the weekend is going to be sunny and warm, then it's off to the beach, or if it's going to rain, a movie would be in order. I remember a Friday afternoon packing up the car for a weekend trip to Hampton Beach. That night I decided to check the weekend weather on the Weather Channel. The channel forecasted downpours for the entire weekend. I decided to change plans and take in a couple of movies at the theater. The Weather Station was right, as it poured cats and dogs all weekend long.

In addition, I have DIRECTV with the sports package. I get to watch the Boston Bruins, Celtics, Red Sox, and New England Patriots. I will not pay the extremely high ticket prices for sporting events. For this reason, television allows me to watch these sporting events. I remember watching a game between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox one Sunday night. My son, Joshua, and I were glued to the TV. Pedro Martinez and Roger Clemens were pitching against one another. What a pitching duel between the two best pitchers in baseball. The top of the ninth inning, there was no score; Roger was pitching to Trot Nixon. Roger threw a fast ball right down the middle of the plate. Crack, Trot sent the ball right out of Yankee Stadium. The Red Sox won the game. The final score was 1 – 0. I had a great night with Joshua, as we got to watch an exciting game together. It was a night we both will remember spending time together and bonding.

Also, I like to keep up with the current local, national, and worldwide news. I can get the financial updates regarding the stock market. This is what television gives me on a constant basis. I like to watch CNN daily to get the national and world news. I remember watching the first Iraq war on CNN. The news reporters gave the live footage, and the bombs going off all around them was so impressive. The bombs would light up the night skies. I could see the anti-aircraft fire launching into the atmosphere. It was like I was right in the middle of the war. I will never forget watching the first Iraq war. I watched the bombing and thought about the innocent people that were being killed. I came to realize how precious life is and how fast it can be taken away.

In conclusion, television has given me an opportunity to plan my outdoor activities, to watch live sporting events, spend time bonding with Joshua, and witness dramatic events that changed my outlook on life. I might be able to do without television, but I would be hard pressed to replace all it gives me. Weather reports on the radio are all right, but nothing like viewing live reports. I no longer would be able to watch live sporting events. Also, newspapers and radio are no match for watching the news events like the Iraq war. Television gives me the visual aspect that radio and newspaper can't. It is my all-in-one passage to the media.

Bradley Wright, 51, of Haverhill, MA, was a student in Stefanie Forster's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2006. Before taking the course, Brad did not like to write, but now that he's finished the course, he says, "I feel relaxed and have confidence in my writing." Brad is a business management major here at NECC. He is the proud father of three sons, Brandon, 27, Joshua, 22, and Robert, 20.

A Little Left of Center
by Paul Berard

Ever since I was a young child, I've enjoyed listening to music. I can remember sitting on the floor in front of our stereo wearing a gigantic set of headphones listening to the Chipmunks and also people like Neil Diamond and Roy Orbison. As I grew older, I started liking music that my older brothers and sister liked. My first two tapes I ever received as gifts were White Snake and Guns N' Roses. I would play them constantly at deafening volumes. Later on I stopped liking rock and started loving rap for a few years. Now I love everything from classical to hardcore death metal. Because I like a lot of different kinds of music, I have a lot of memories and feelings that I connect with a lot of different songs, although rock songs seem to get me motivated and energized more than any other genre of music. From the first note until the final riff, my heart seems to be racing and the testosterone seems to be flowing throughout my body. One song seems to get me pumped every time I hear it. That song is "Not Falling" by Mudvayne. The song "Not Falling" gets me in a good mood and motivates me to keep going no matter what happens or what people say.

Mudvayne is a "metal" band that I've really been into for the past five years. I started liking Mudvayne back in 2001 when I first saw them at the Off-Fest. The day after that awesome concert, I ran out and bought their *L.D. 50* CD. One of my favorite songs from Mudvayne is "Not Falling," which can be found on their *The End of All Things to Come* CD. "Not Falling" is a great song. It has a fast tempo and hard beat. The drums and guitars are insanely complex, and the vocals are ridiculous and loud. When you put them all together, you get the chaotic harmonies that make Mudvayne.

The lyrics to Mudvayne's "Not Falling" read like a strong, deep, dark poem, with verses like "Always, known in, all my time/A little left of center now/Reflect as I realize/That all I need is to find the middle pillar path to sit like the sun by a star in the sky and just be/Sinners, casting stones at me." This verse makes me think about the singer being different from everyone else, but he's trying to conform and fit in. No matter how much he tries to fit in, there are still people who still criticize him for being different. I kind of feel the same way sometimes. I'm a little different from other people. I have tattoos and piercings, and deliver food for a living, so I get judged about these things. People can "cast stones" at me as much as they want because I am who I am, and I don't plan on changing for them or anyone else.

This song gets me motivated when I'm having problems. Whether it is money problems or anything else, I can pop the CD in and listen to "Not Falling" and I am instantly motivated to get over the problem. The chorus is the main part of the song that gets me pumped. The chorus has both lead vocals and some backup vocals: "I, I stand – not crawling/Not falling down/I, I bleed – the demons that drag me down/I, I stand/(For nothing)/Not crawling/(The center)/Not falling down/(Of calms within the eye!)/I, I'll bleed/(For no one)/The demons/(But myself)/That pull me down…/(For me and no one else)." This song gets me motivated because of a couple of reasons. One of the reasons is the beat and tempo; it's fast and hard so it gets me pumped. Another reason is because of the lyrics in the chorus. I always think of it as my problems being the "demons," and I won't let them drag me down. If you let them drag you down or make you "bleed," then sooner or later you can't get back up.

I think I'm always going to be a little "left of center" because I don't see myself changing for anyone. I always see myself following my own path. As long as there are demons trying to bring me down and make me bleed, I will listen to "Not Falling" and other rock songs to get me motivated to beat those demons. Rock music will always be a part of me and my life. Whether I need it to motivate me to do something or pump me up for a game or test, it will always be there for me.

Paul Berard is 24 years old and lives in Haverhill, MA. He enjoys playing paintball and poker, and he is majoring in liberal arts. Before taking Basic Writing with Joanna Fortna in the spring of 2006, Paul hated writing. Now he says, "I'm much more confident about what I write, and I find it easier to write."

Remarkable Samba
by Jucie Whitlock

Samba is an incredible traditional Brazilian music. Consequently, I chose it as my favorite type of music. My reasons for choosing Samba are very simple. Although its energetic rhythm and harmony are so extraordinary that it shakes me up when I am down, I would like to mention that the most significant reason why I chose Samba is the feeling of connection that I get from it. It keeps me in touch with my Brazilian roots due to the fact that I used to enjoy it when I was a little girl. I believe that there is something beyond special about Samba because it brings people from all ages and economic levels together to enjoy it. Samba is the most energetic and enjoyable traditional Brazilian music.

The energy that I get from Samba rhythm and harmony has been very useful to me. It is characterized by a syncopated beat and is generally performed on percussion instruments, guitars, and cavaquinhos (small, four-string guitars). Samba is a very loud and fast type of music. Paulinho da Viola is my favorite singer who makes a unique combination with percussion instruments and his beautiful voice which produce really happy songs. My favorite song is "Deixa a Vida Me Levar," which means "Allows Life to Take Me." This is my favorite because it is a loud and happy song and makes me feel happier. It gives me that motivation I need to keep up with my daily routine.

Every day when I am on my way home from work, I like to listen to Samba because I feel that it helps me recharge my energy after a really long and stressful day. It gives me the inspiration I need to continue to drive, and it also makes me feel refreshed like I just woke up after a relaxed night of sleep. As I am driving and listening to it, I let myself enjoy it so much that my mind goes to this place where I wish I could just get out of the car and start dancing. Sometimes I even start to move my body and I feel embarrassed when I catch other drivers looking at me. Although I feel embarrassed, I try not to pay too much attention to them for the reason that I am having a blast listening to it.

I also like to listen to Samba when I am cleaning my house and cooking Brazilian food. For instance, last Saturday I was very busy cleaning my house for Easter because I was having a few friends over for dinner. I knew that I would need approximately two hours just to prepare the meal that I was planning on serving, which was a delicious Brazilian food called Feijoada, which is made with black beans, bacon, pork ribs, kielbasa, and served with white rice and collard greens. Although I knew that I had a lot to do, I decided to listen to my favorite Samba, "Allows Life to Take Me." Once again it gave me the motivation I needed to finish all I had planned.

Samba allows me to experience an extraordinary feeling of connection with my Brazilian roots. I suppose that the reason why I get this feeling from it is because when I was about nine years old, I really had a hard time learning how to dance Samba. I recall watching a television show called Chagrinha that used to come on every Saturday at 4:00 p.m. I tried to follow the steps of the dancers on the show, but it wasn't easy because as professionals they danced too fast, which made it very hard for me to learn. Besides, my brother Renauther, who was only two years older than me, used to walk into the living room where I was just to make fun of me since I couldn't get it right.

He used to ask me, "Do you think that you can dance like that?"

"No," I said.

"I think you are wasting your time with this," he said.

"It's fine. I have nothing else to do," I said.

Then after a few minutes, he would finally leave me alone, which I was really happy about because the show only lasted 30 minutes. I kept watching the show for many Saturdays, and although it wasn't easy for me to learn, I was proud of myself for not giving up. Even though it seemed really easy to dance Samba, I wasn't able to move my body, especially my hips, as fast as the music rhythm required due to the fact that I was too young. The steps were really simple. I just had to move my feet in two different ways, but due to the fact that Samba has a very fast rhythm which makes it sound like Salsa but 10 times faster, I wasn't able to follow it. However, it was worth it because I learned the steps and the techniques to dance it right, which keeps my connection with my Brazilian roots alive.

Samba also helps bring many generations of people from different economic levels together without discrimination. For instance, in Brazil we have a traditional party called Carnaval, which means happiness and fun. It was created by slaves who use the Carnaval as a form to forget the terrible way that they were treated by their owners. Since then, people get together on the streets and clubs for five days straight to enjoy each other and Samba. It usually starts on the last Friday of February and goes until Tuesday. Some people even dress up in all kinds of costumes just to make it even more fun. I recall that the first time I saw a man dressed as a woman was at the Carnaval, which I thought was unique and fun. My mother said that I laughed so much and that I didn't stop talking about it. They had created a saying that says: "If you don't like Samba, you must have a sick mind or something is wrong with your feet." This saying is very popular there because Brazil has been motivated by Samba for many decades. My mother used to take me and my siblings to Carnaval, and my grandmother always came along. It was my favorite party, especially after I had learned how to dance Samba. My mother also said that I used to get incredibly afraid of some of the costumes that people wore. She said that I would grab her legs and nothing could make me let go of them, especially when I saw people dressed as Draculas, skeletons, and Indians. I think that is hilarious since I don't recall being afraid of anything. I only remember having a great time with my family and being tired on the next day because I danced so much the day before. Samba is beautiful and so are the memories that it brings to me.

I really feel connected to Samba due to its ability to make me feel its rhythm and vitality inside my soul. It is the only type of music that allows me to relax and enjoy what life has to offer one day at a time. Despite where I am at today or where I will be in the future, Samba will always be in my life to make sure I don't forget where I came from. I hope that I will live long enough to pass my love for it down to my grandchildren so they will be able to enjoy all the beautiful things about it. Samba is the music of my life. It means energy, happiness, connection, and living my life at its fullest.

Jucie Whitlock, 39, lives in Haverhill, MA and is a radiology student. One of her hobbies is dance. Jucie feels more confident about her writing since her Basic Writing class with Stefanie Forster in the spring of 2006.

The American Dream
by Sterling Hager

I have been working as a landscaper for the last six years of my life. Recently I got a new job working at B&W Press in Georgetown, MA. I work nights, unlike landscaping, but with the same kind of immigrant workers. It is my opinion that anyone who is respectable, hardworking, and honest deserves the same freedoms and liberties of those that are citizens. Immigrants help the melting pot, take extra jobs, and contribute to our economy.

Indeed, America has always been a melting pot to so many people from all over the world; it has entwined cultures, races, religions, and ethics of thousands of different people. Other than Native Americans everyone in this beautiful country is here due to the fact that one of their ancestors was an immigrant that came here from another country. My own great-grandfather was an immigrant. He came here from Italy. I love to hear the stories of the brave people that left their homes with nothing more than the clothes on their backs and the hand of fate to carry them to come to America. Once they made it to America like my great-grandfather they prospered; they succeeded in making a living. They triumphed and had children. The accomplishments they have made are amazing after the hardships they endured. A lot of immigrants came here to escape persecution in their home country that did not accept people for who they are or what their beliefs were so they left to start a new life in America. The immigrants of today are people just like any of us are. They have feelings and emotions. Why are these beautiful people being treated like third-class citizens? Every day they are targeted by hate, persecuted even here for being who they are. That is wrong. Everyone deserves to be treated fairly with respect and kindness.

Consequently, immigrants take the jobs that nobody else will take. If it was not for them, companies that make the things we need would go out of business. Immigrants will work for less money and do a better job than someone that feels overqualified and better than the job they're doing. Other small businesses like landscaping depend on their immigrant workers to get the job done. They are the ones the boss can depend on. As a landscaping foreman, I sometimes had trouble with the language barrier but the immigrant worker always made up for it a hundredfold with their work effort and ethics.

In fact, when immigrants start working they help our economy. They purchase items which creates wealth. Immigrants work for commercial companies that pay huge amounts of taxes and keep small rural areas afloat. Immigrant work forces are the backbone to the labor industry. Without immigrants' labor, many companies would not meet the quotas and go under, so I ask myself why we would put laws in place prohibiting these people from working when they do such a good job. It would not do us any justice, in my opinion, to not allow them to work in our country.

There are many people that will not agree with my opinion on immigrants being able to work in the USA, but that is always going to be a fact. There are also always going to be a few immigrants that break laws, go onto welfare, and abuse the system, but why label the whole crowd for that small minority? It would be wrong to persecute immigrants as a whole for the selfish actions of a few individuals.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that immigrant workers are a valuable and important asset to America as a whole. They have the same dream that most of our

ancestors had which is to be given a chance to succeed in America, the land of opportunity. This country was built on those dreams; it prospered on those dreams. It is the incredible mixture of people that makes this country so unique and beautiful. I have been and always will be appreciative and thankful of immigrant workers. I have remained friends with several of the immigrants I was given the opportunity to work with and train. In my opinion, if I was to vote on immigrant laws I would always vote to let them stay, work, and become a part of what we all strive to have: the American dream.

Sterling B. Hager, 24, lives in West Boxford, MA, and works as a converter operator. His career goal is to be a photographer for National Geographic. Since taking Mike Wilcomb's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2006, Sterling feels "like a strong writer."

Healthcare for the Elderly
by Deborah Holbrook

For most of my adult life, I have taken care of the elderly. That has made me really notice the high cost and lack of healthcare coverage in their lives. I don't think someone should have to make a choice between eating or taking medication. They also shouldn't have to decide which medication they need the most. They should be able to take the amount of medication that is prescribed to them. Based on all my experience and with all the resources the United States has, there should be affordable healthcare for our elderly.

After working their entire lives, the elderly should be able to maintain their quality of life. They have put years of time and effort into working and raising their families. They even tried to save for their old age. With the high cost of healthcare facilities such as assisted living facilities (some can be as high as $6,000 a month), a person's life savings can be depleted in no time. I know a lady who was at an assisted living facility and her money ran out, and she had to leave and go to elderly housing. I know of two residents at the facility where I work who had to go to a nursing home due to financial reasons.

All of the elderly should have adequate healthcare coverage so they can afford their prescription medicine. A few years ago, my father-in-law was hospitalized after suffering a heart attack. We were at his house taking care of my mother-in-law, and we checked his medications and discovered he was not taking them as prescribed. He would only take half of what the physician had prescribed. For example, if the prescription said take one every day, he would take one every other day. He would do this so the prescription would last two months instead of one month. He did have some insurance, but he couldn't always afford the co-payments. He was on several medications so even the co-payments were too much on his limited income.

"Dad, how come you're not taking your meds as the doctor prescribed?" I questioned him.

"I can't always afford the co-payments," he sadly told me.

"We will all make sure you have your meds," I reassured him. After discovering this, his family was able to see that he got all his medications. Not all the elderly may have families that are able to do this. We sometimes would help buy groceries for my in-laws. They didn't always have enough money left after paying their medical bills.

Another reason the elderly population should have adequate healthcare coverage is so they don't lose their homes. My father-in-law even refinanced on his home to pay off some of his medical bills. This made him have a mortgage that he really couldn't afford, as he had a very limited income. When he passed away, the house he had lived in for over 50 years and had raised his family in had to be sold to pay off remaining medical bills and the mortgage. This was a very emotional time for his family, as they had to see the home they grew up in sold to strangers. I remember the family getting together to go through the house and having to decide what to keep and what to get rid of. This made me feel sad to see a lifetime of memories gone in an instant.

Finally, I feel that not having adequate healthcare coverage can greatly affect the elderly population's health. Without proper healthcare coverage, they will not get proper healthcare, which will affect the quality of their life. I remember one time my father-in-law had a bad cold and he couldn't afford to go to the doctors. He then became ill with pneumonia. If he had adequate healthcare coverage he may not have contracted pneumonia. He never really recovered, as he had a heart condition which became worse after he had pneumonia.

My feelings on this are that the elderly should have adequate healthcare coverage and adequate prescription coverage no matter what their income status is. They shouldn't have to decide whether to buy food or fill a prescription. They shouldn't have to lose everything they worked their entire life for. I'm not sure what the answer to this dilemma is, but we are a rich country and no one should go without adequate healthcare coverage.

Deborah Holbrook, 48, lives in Amesbury, MA. She is married and has two daughters, ages 24 and 22. A nursing assistant in her current job, Deborah is studying to be a nurse. She says, "I feel more aware of my writing now," after finishing Basic Writing in Craig Stevens's spring 2006 class.

Cheerleading Is a Sport!
by Rachel Morrison

Most people argue that cheerleading is not a sport. Cheerleading is just about pompoms, smiles, and looking pretty. Also, checrleaders don't show any athleticism, and cheerleading is an activity based on confidence and school spirit. In actuality, it is one of the most intense sports. Unlike other sports that only consist of one season, cheerleading has two. Each season, cheerleaders cheer for both the football and basketball teams. Like cross country, cheerleaders run; like football, we toss; like soccer, we kick; like track and field, we jump. We even lift weights! We risk our lives every day doing pyramids more than 15 feet in the air. Like all other sports, we also suffer severe injuries. We work just as hard as "real athletes" do. I have been a cheerleader for about seven years, and it's really aggravating when people, mostly men, say that cheerleading is not a sport. Cheerleading is a sport that requires dedication and skill, high endurance, being physically fit, a lot of flexibility, and the ability to demonstrate acrobatics. I strongly believe that cheerleading is a sport.

Cheerleading takes just as much dedication and skill as any other sport. Sometimes it takes even more. The sport of cheerleading, unlike most, is not a selfish one. Part of being on a cheerleading squad is appreciating and cheering on our fellow athletes, the same athletes that insult our sport. What is it that qualifies an activity to be a sport? Is it the ball? No, wrestling is a sport and it doesn't contain a ball. Is it the sweat? It can't be the sweat. Cheerleaders sweat just as much. Is it the practice? I don't think so. Our practices are more intense than many other sports' practices. The audience? No, it can't be that either. Audiences at competitions outnumber those at many ball games! So what is it? The problem is that other athletes have no idea what it takes to be a cheerleader. We make it look so easy. We fly through the air with grace. We catch our teammates as though they are feathers floating from the sky. People don't understand the technique and time it takes to master such skills. To us, cheerleading is not a game, like football or basketball. Cheerleading is a way of life. Cheerleading, more than any other sport, teaches important skills such as cooperation. Let's face it. If a cheerleading squad can't cooperate, stunts can't hit and people get hurt.

Cheerleading is a sport that requires high endurance and strength. You must be trained to have high endurance because when it comes time for competition we have five minutes to show off everything we've got. Our competitions consist of a cheer, a dance, and daring stunts. Therefore, you build up all your endurance and strength each practice and game day. It's really hard when you are doing cheering, dancing, and stunting for a consecutive five minutes straight. For an example, my first competition I competed in I had five stunts, one dance, and two cheers. Throughout the whole competition, I needed to keep a smile on my face and compete to the fullest extent. Because I trained all season, my endurance level increased so I was able to perform well.

Just like any other sport, you must be physically fit to be a cheerleader. There is a lot of time in training for the upcoming seasons. Stunting and gymnastics require bodies that are in shape and prepared to handle the stress put on your body. If you think you can go out onto the field and just throw someone up in the air without having any sort of muscle tone, they're not going to go very high. For an example, to keep fit for fall

competition, I had to train for two months over the summer, four days a week, two hours a day, in order to be in good condition for cheerleading.

Gymnastics and flexibility is another crucial aspect of cheerleading. The Massachusetts score card for cheerleading competitions has a section dedicated to gymnastics all on its own. In order to score even a decent score on this section, you must have full-team tumbling. This requires every member on the team to be able to perform at least a back handspring. In order to perform these tumbling passes, you must receive extensive training to teach your body how to flip through the air upside down, backwards, frontwards, sideways, and every way you could imagine.

A sport is defined as physical activity that is governed by a set of rules or customs and often engaged in competitively. We have a set of rules and we compete! In conclusion, cheerleading in my opinion is most definitely a sport. We train just as hard as other "real athletes" do. Cheerleading requires dedication and skill, high endurance, being physically fit, a lot of flexibility, and the ability to demonstrate acrobatics. These qualities are what sportsmanship is about.

Rachel Morrison, 19, enjoys shopping and is studying for a career in accounting. She lives in North Andover, MA. Rachel took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course in the fall of 2005. She says, "I wasn't a confident writer, but now with being a confident writer, I'm happy and enjoy writing."

My Writing Techniques
by Jovanna Taveras

In my writing class, I learned everyone has their own techniques for writing an essay. There are several ways that people can develop ideas. In my case, I learned a lot of different ways to make myself a better writer. My first technique would be prewriting. Prewriting helps me develop my ideas before I start writing. I also learned how to organize my paragraphs by using a three-part thesis statement and topic sentences for each body paragraph. Organizing a paragraph makes me understand how I'm trying to develop my ideas. The last technique that helps me write a good essay is peer response. Peer response helps me create more ideas for my writing. These are techniques that are very helpful for everyone in general, not just me.

The first technique I use when I'm about to write a paper is prewriting. Prewriting is when you write your ideas about a main topic before writing your paper. Prewriting helps me develop ideas for the paper I wish to write about. What I do is write a list about my main idea. In my writing class, I had written a media paper. My media paper was about the benefits of the internet. I had to give three reasons why the internet is a benefit. I started listing the reasons why the internet is helpful. Prewriting helped me pick the most informative three reasons why the internet is helpful. I think prewriting helps me develop my ideas in many different ways.

Another technique I would use to write a paper is to organize my paragraphs. What I mean by this is having a good thesis statement and also having a good topic for each paragraph that will support my thesis statement. This is very important because this would give the reader and me a good understanding about what I am trying to write about. When I create a thesis statement, it leads me to what I have to do next. For example, I wrote an essay in my writing class about my opinion about our community. In my paper, I wrote about my community not having enough jobs for people to support their needs in life. I gave a thesis statement saying, "Unemployment affects people's cost of living, public safety, and access of education." This thesis statement helped me develop my body paragraphs because each reason I gave is the topic of my body paragraphs. All I would have to do next is develop ideas and reasons to support my topic. Organizing paragraphs can give the reader a better communication with what the author is trying to say.

Peer responding is one of my favorite techniques to use. I think it is very helpful for me because it gives us the chance to talk to a fellow student in the class to share ideas. I can receive good information that I might need or never thought to put in my paper. My partner can also give me good feedback in the form of praise that might give questions, comments, and ideas to develop my paper. It's very helpful because it gives you the chance to hear someone else's opinions. Working with someone else helps you develop more ideas for the paper you desire to write about. They can also help you exclude information that doesn't need to be there. Peer response helped me expand my narrative paper for my second graded essay. It was very helpful because my partner asked me questions about what she would like to know more about. My narrative paper was about a memorable basketball game. I wrote about how my game seemed so miserable at one point but it turned out to be the best game I ever had. In my narrative paper I didn't do so good in my conclusion paragraph because I didn't have enough information. I seriously

didn't know what to write about until my classmate gave me questions such as, what did I learn from my game, how did this change me, and why was this game so important to me. This gave me a chance to expand my information in my conclusion paragraph. Peer response will be a good idea for people who have a hard time developing their ideas.

I realize that my Basic Writing class has really made a great difference in my writing skills. The reason why I say this is because when I was in high school I would start writing without developing ideas. Prewriting is useful for developing ideas; organization in writing is useful to have a better understanding and have a good communication with your reader; peer response is good to get more ideas. These are strategies and techniques I like using when I have to write a paper. I believe that in the future as I keep on learning more techniques on how to write a good essay or story it will become easier for me. Of course, there are different ways of developing ideas. There are some people who observe the environment to get ideas for a paper. There are also people who speak to different people for different opinions and points of view. These are techniques that help people create different types of ideas. I also learned that working toward one's own goal and the ability to work with others are essential. My writing class also taught me appropriate skills and abilities. Everyone has different ways of writing a paper. This class taught me how to use prewriting, organization in my writing, and peer responding.

Jovanna Taveras, 19, lives in Lawrence, MA, and is studying nursing. She enjoys shopping with friends and playing basketball. In the spring of 2006, Jovanna took Basic Writing with Lori Grace. She feels that her attitude toward writing has improved: "My Basic Writing instructor was very helpful. Now I feel confident and understand the purpose when I write."